



**Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP)
2018 Américas Award for
Children's and Young Adult Literature**

The Américas Award is given in recognition of U.S. works of fiction, poetry, folklore, or selected non-fiction (from picture books to works for young adults) published in the previous year in English or Spanish that authentically and engagingly portray Latin America, the Caribbean or Latinos in the United States. By combining both and linking the Americas, the award reaches beyond geographic borders, as well as multicultural boundaries, focusing instead upon cultural heritages within the hemisphere. The award is sponsored by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP).

The Américas Award winners, honorable mention titles and commended titles are selected for their:

- 1) Distinctive literary quality
- 2) Cultural contextualization
- 3) Exceptional integration of text, illustration and design; and
- 4) Potential for classroom use.

The winning books will be honored at a ceremony on **September 28, 2018** during Hispanic Heritage Month at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

2018 Américas Award Winners

American Street written by Ibi Zoboi. HarperCollins Publishers, 2017. ISBN: 978-0062473042

Fabiola's life in the U.S. begins with loss and yearning: her mother is detained on their way from Haiti. While adjusting to life in Detroit, a new school, new social codes, and a family she has known only through phone calls for most of her life, Fabiola struggles to free her mother from detainment—or find the people who will help her do so. She lives with her aunt and three cousins in a house that sits at the corner of American Street and Joy Road. Here in this new place Haitian faith meets Black American culture, and the memories of the past help Fabiola to make sense of the present. Fabiola calls on the *lwas* to help her get her mom back, discovers desire, and unravels secrets. Readers will enjoy the dynamism of Fabiola's cousins—the “Three Bees”—whose own motivations and inclinations propel the story forward, while appreciating the ever determined Fabiola. This complex and multi-layered story is anchored around relationships and questions of loyalty—how deep does our loyalty go, to whom do we give it, and what are we willing to sacrifice? (Grades 10-12)

Danza! Amalia Hernández and el Ballet Folklórico de México written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh. Abrams Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1419725326

Award-winning author and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh brings us the first-ever children's biography of Amalia Hernández, the dancer and choreographer who founded the famed Mexican dance company, el Ballet Folklórico de México. In this magnificent celebration of her life, Tonatiuh introduces readers to a young Amalia, or “Ami” whose love for dance and music is

set into motion after witnessing a lively display of folk dancing in a town plaza. In that formative moment, Ami got hooked on dancing as an art form, and soon began her formal studies in the classic European ballet styles of the time. However, as we learn through Tonatiuh's masterful Mixtec-inspired illustrations and text, Ami returned to her Mexican roots to thoroughly research and choreograph regional and pre-Colombian indigenous dances from across the country. Much like Ami, Tonatiuh shows deep respect for the art forms of Mexico's past while blending well-written descriptions with carefully chosen artistic details in a way that is compelling and accessible to readers of all ages. He also provides a wealth of additional backmatter that easily lends itself for classroom use, such as an author's note, glossary, and bibliography. In bringing Ami's story to life, we learn that her legacy gloriously lives on, as dancers both in Mexico and beyond continue to perform Mexican folk dance and music for appreciative audiences worldwide. (Grades 2-5)

2018 Américas Award Honorable Mention Titles

All the Way to Havana written by Margarita Engle and illustrated by Mike Curato. Godwin Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2017. ISBN: 978-1627796422

All the Way to Havana is the delightful story of a young boy traveling to the big city of Havana, Cuba in his family's old blue car- Cara Cara. This story tells of the adventure his family has while traveling to his Tia's house to celebrate the zero-year birthday of his new baby cousin. Along the way, they pick up friendly neighbors in need of a short ride, while never losing sight of the family celebration ahead. As they enter the city, the bright and colorful cars attract their attention, yet despite their flashiness, the young boy still prefers his Cara Cara's peaceful blue hue. After a fulfilling day of celebration, the family begins their long journey through the cover of night back to their village. The following day as the father is working under the hood of his car, he asks his son which city-trip car he liked the most. The young boy answered without hesitation, "our car, because it belonged to our family when Abuelo celebrated his zero-year birthday!" This engaging story celebrates the resourcefulness and spirit of the young boy's family as well as that of the Cuban people they greet along the way. Margarita Engle's masterful use of onomatopoeia coupled with the brilliant illustrations of Mike Curato make this an engaging read aloud for the young reader. (Grades K-2)

Lucky Broken Girl written by Ruth Behar. Nancy Paulsen Books, Penguin Random House LLC, 2017. ISBN: 978-0399546440

"These boots are made for walkin'...and that's just what they'll do. One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you!" This is the song fifth-grader Ruthie Mizrahi, a Cuban-Jewish girl sings after receiving a pair of white go-go boots from her father. Having recently immigrated to New York in the 1960s, we see the struggles her family faces with her mother missing Cuba, at the same time trying to forget it, all the while her father is working multiple jobs to make ends meet. However, things start to look up for young Ruthie as she begins to adjust to her new life. She finds herself moving out of the "dumb" class at school and has become known as the neighborhood hop-scotch queen. Then one night her family is involved in a tragic car accident and everything changes. Ruthie is so badly injured that she is forced to lie in bed in a body cast immobilized for nearly a year. Based on the life of author Ruth Behar, *Lucky Broken Girl* is an inspirational story that allows us to witness the struggles and successes that ultimately form the diverse friendships that bring hope and happiness into her life. (Grades 4-8)

2018 Américas Award Commended Titles

Bravo! Poems About Amazing Hispanics written by Margarita Engle and illustrated by Rafael López. Godwin Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2017. ISBN: 978-0805098761

Young People's Poet Laureate, Margarita Engle captivates us with her poetry in *Bravo! Poems About Amazing Hispanics*. Engle writes in the first person, detailing the past lives of a myriad of people from diverse countries. Through her unique style of poetry, she shares chronologically the accomplishments of eighteen different Hispanic figures throughout history. There is Juan de Miralles, a successful Cuban merchant who helped defeat British Troops in Florida in the 1700s, Pura Belpre, author and New York Public Library system's Spanish Children's Specialist who is known as the first Puerto Rican ever hired in the system and for introducing bilingual story hours in the early 1900s, and of course the talented Tito Puente, a professional musician who became known as the King of Latin Jazz. The vibrant illustrations of Rafael López complement each diverse character. Additional biographical information called *Notes About the Lives* wraps up this beautiful book of poetry and offers a great introduction to many amazing Latinos! (Grades 2-6)

Disappeared written by Francisco X. Stork. Arthur A. Levine, 2017. ISBN: 978-0545944472

In this heart-racing thriller, Francisco X. Stork brings us the tale of two Mexican teenagers, Sara and Emiliano Zapata, who call the border town of Ciudad Juarez home. Stork expertly draws these two characters against a backdrop of challenging moral decisions that they face in their hometown. Sara, a budding newspaper journalist, is dedicated to exposing the stories of abducted teenage girls who have been disappearing from their city. Meanwhile, her brother Emiliano, is a star soccer player who is smitten with his girlfriend Perla Rubí, and dedicated to his small, entrepreneurial business in which he connects the work of local folk artists with buyers across the border. As we quickly learn, Sara and Emiliano's ambitions, hopes, and goals begin to unavoidably pull them into a darker world rife with corruption and sometimes life-threatening decisions. Stork sensitively tackles serious topics such as drug trafficking, the persecution of journalists, violence and corruption in a multi-faceted way that is resonant with readers. While *Disappeared* is a fast-paced page-turner certain to have wide appeal, Stork does an outstanding job of portraying real-life challenges and the influence that deeply felt desires, such as ambition, greed, love, and hope, can have on one's decision-making processes. Educators will find an array of rich, thought-provoking themes for discussion. (Grades 10-12)

The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora written by Pablo Cartaya. Penguin Random House, 2017. ISBN: 978-1101997239

In this humorous and tender novel, author Pablo Cartaya introduces middle grade readers to Arturo Zamora, a memorably drawn 8th grader living in Miami who kicks off his summer with a part-time job washing dishes at his Cuban-American family's restaurant "La Cocina de la Isla". Between hanging out with his friends, spending time at the restaurant, and developing a budding crush on an old childhood friend, Arturo's summer gets off to a fairly typical start.

However, that quickly changes once Wilfrido Pipo, a real estate developer, arrives in his neighborhood with an aggressive plan to build a new high-rise tower that would displace “La Cocina de la Isla”. Together with his family, Arturo is drawn into a battle not only for their cherished restaurant, but also for his community’s identity and way of life. In telling this story, Cartaya artfully fuses meaningful family history imparted by Arturo’s grandparents, snippets of José Martí’s poetry, and themes of civic engagement and the importance of perseverance and self-confidence. The author also expertly sprinkles in Spanish in a way that is easily decipherable for readers who may or may not speak the language. As the tension ratchets up in *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, readers will find themselves rooting for his epic win as he grapples with new challenges and learns more about himself and his community in the process. (Grades 4-7)

Forest World written by Margarita Engle. Atheneum, 2017. ISBN: 978-1481490573

In this timely novel written in verse, Cuban-American author Margarita Engle introduces readers to the story of two siblings, Edver and Luza, whose family has been split right down in the middle due to the political circumstances surrounding the United States and Cuba. Edver, age 10, has resided in Miami much of his life with his cryptobiologist mother. Meanwhile, his sister Luza, age 11, has remained on the Cuban island with her father, as she helps him work to protect the diverse species that live on a World Biosphere Reserve. In shifting between the alternate voices of Edver and Luza, we gain insight into the conflicting emotions that the two have felt after not having seen each other since they were very young. As relations between Cuba and the U.S. have thawed in recent years, they are then reunited to spend a summer together in Cuba, and have much to learn in the process about each other and the lives that they have separately lived. In a gentle yet incisive style, Engle adeptly explores issues such as protecting biodiversity while permitting tourism and the sharp differences between life in Cuba and the United States, and the feelings that can arise as a result. Her well-researched novel presents an abundance of topics to be discussed in educational settings while still being an exciting and easy-to-devour eco-adventure. (Grades 4-6)

Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos written by Monica Brown and illustrated by John Parra. NorthSouth Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-0735842694

This biography of Frida Kahlo is presented from the unique perspective of her beloved – albeit unusual – pets. Readers will enjoy the story that reveals her “spirited and entertaining” menagerie of monkeys, parrot, dogs, turkeys, eagle, cat, and fawn, who largely inspired her colorful character. The author describes the pets, referred to as Frida’s “special friends,” and compares their endearing qualities to Frida’s own while showcasing how they helped Frida keep a resilient spirit despite the drastic setbacks in her life. Readers will be captivated by how the animals lived and played a role in her work. A bonus feature for teachers is the Author’s Note, which can be used to provide students with additional details about Frida’s life, including titles of the paintings that encompassed her cherished pets. (Grades K – 3)

Lucía the Luchadora written by Cynthia Leonor Garza and illustrated by Alyssa Bermudez. Pow Kids Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1576878279

This picture book is about a young dark-haired girl who loves to wear a superhero red cape. She can flip, run, and jump off monkey bars in the park better than anybody. She is agile, brave, sharp, and fun. But boys playing near dart away when she tries to play with them. “Girls can’t be superheroes! Girls are just made of sugar and spice and everything nice!” the boys say. Lucía gets mad and with her Abu (short for *abuela*, or grandmother) scheme a plan. That night, Abu gives her a secret box. It has a silver mask and cape. These were Abu’s when she was a *luchadora* (female wrestler). Being a *luchadora* is more than having quick moves or a cool style. “A *luchadora* has moxie, and isn’t afraid to fight for what is right,” Abu explains. Lucía then takes on a new secret identity and starts wearing the silver mask in the playground. After a string of events in the park, Lucía saves a puppy yelping in fear stranded on the top of swirly slide. “Bravo!” everybody cheers, except a girl in a pink outfit who looks sad. Lucía wants to do what is right; she takes off her mask and smiles to encourage the girl in pink. Then, several others take off their masks. They are girls too. Indeed, you don’t need a mask to be a *luchadora*! This beautifully illustrated book offers a cultural view of “Mexican superheroes” and celebrates the courage, strength, wit, and determination of girls all over the world. (Grade K-3)

Martí’s Song for Freedom/Martí y sus Versos por la Libertad, written by Emma Otheguy and illustrated by Beatriz Vidal. Children’s Book Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0892393756

This English-Spanish bilingual picture book is a short biography of José Martí (1853-1895), a famous Cuban political essayist and poet. The book is written as a long poem in free verse style, interspersed with stanzas of Martí’s “Versos Sencillos.” The story chronicles his political activism through his speeches, newspaper articles, and poetry. This book honors Martí and others like him who fought against slavery and the oppression of colonialism. Interestingly, unlike other children’s books about José Martí, a third of this book focuses on his yearning for Cuba. His homesickness is appeased by going for walks in the beautiful Catskill Mountains, which also provided renovated inspiration for his writing. In a way, he seemed to have embraced two homelands, two cultures, and two languages, like many Latina/o children growing up in the U.S. These connections would prove useful in classroom discussions, as well as for raising consciousness about issues of equality and democracy. The unique book illustrations resemble chalk pastel art, which add a blur effect to the drawings. (Grade 3-5)

Rubén Darío written by Georgina Lázaro and illustrated by Lonnie Ruiz. Lectorum Publications, 2017. ISBN: 978-1632456410

This picture book is the biography of Nicaraguan Rubén Darío (1867-1916). He was a journalist, essayist, poet, novelist, and diplomat. Darío was a clever innovator and is considered the father of the Modernism movement in Spanish literature. This book consists of a poem with 60 stanzas each composed of 4 verses, and each verse has 8 syllables with an A-B-A-B rhyming pattern. Verses don’t follow traditional sentence structure and also include picturesque words, intricate metaphors and symbolism, all emulating Darío’s style in his celebrated poem *Margarita Esta Linda La Mar*, or “Margarita the Sea is Beautiful.” This piece is learned in schools and recited by children in Central America. Writing and reciting complex poetry is highly regarded in Spanish speaking countries. Hence, the book highlights this cultural-linguistic tradition. Additionally, Rubén Darío like other literary celebrities is a role model for young authors. Puerto Rican Georgina Lázaro, writer of this book explains that it is part of a biographical series that “relates in a poetic and enjoyable manner the childhoods of people that left their mark in our world, and reminds us that tomorrow’s achievements depend on today’s children.” The text is supported by

the distinctive drawings of Lonnie Ruiz, a talented Nicaraguan graphic designer. Due to its academic register, this book is suitable for use in a Spanish language arts class with students whose Spanish proficiency is intermediate-advanced or advanced. (Grade 3-5).

Sing, Don't Cry written by Angela Dominguez. Henry Holt and Company, 2017. ISBN: 978-1627798396

The story, which is inspired by the Mexican ballad *Cielito Lindo*, is a loving tribute to the author's grandfather. Readers of Mexican heritage will recognize the title translated from a verse in the song – rendered sweet lovely one – that is often sang to young children as a lullaby. Dominguez affectionately recounts how her grandfather, who was an accomplished singer and performer, would visit from Mexico and sing to her and her brother each night. He would warmly advise his grandchildren to keep an optimistic spirit whenever they were discouraged and sing rather than cry because singing “gladdens the heart.” The charming illustrations make it is easy for children to follow the storyline. Teachers can use the story in lessons aimed to engage children in honoring their grandparents, sharing their own suggestions for staying motivated despite challenging setbacks, and comparing *Cielito Lindo* to lullabies from different cultures. (Grades K – 2)

The First Rule of Punk written by Celia C. Pérez. Penguin Random House, 2017. ISBN: 978-0425290408

María Luisa, better known as Malú, is the daughter of a white U.S. American father who owns a record store and loves punk music and a second-generation Mexican-American mother who is a professor and strives to keep her daughter connected to her roots. Moving with her mother to a largely Chicano neighborhood in Chicago away from the home she's always known in California, opinionated Malú must deal with the familiar challenges of being the new kid in town while making sure to express her punk identity. While she finds peers who challenge her Mexicanness and her ability to fit in, she also finds new friends and a new community. In discovering the history of Mexican-American punk music and creating some of her own, Malú brings together the parts of her own identity that previously seemed to clash. With endearing, complex characters, including a fierce Malú, this novel makes a compelling read for youth interested in issues of fitting in, self-expression through music, exploring one's cultural roots, and biracial identity. One of the more colorful aspects of this novel is the inclusion of zines interspersed throughout which document Malú's ever-evolving world. (Grades 5-8)

The Inexplicable Logic of My Life written by Benjamin Alire Sáenz. Clarion Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-0544586505

In this story, main character Salvador, a seventeen-year old white boy adopted and raised by a gay Mexican father, is coming to reckon with an unknown part of himself as he approaches a new point of transition: senior year, applying for college, preparing to leave home. His best friend Sam has her own hardships and yearnings to endure, and through their respective journeys, they grow together. Along the way they befriend Fito, a young man on his own path toward brighter days. This is a story about what makes a family. It is a story of how culture is passed down and the values that go with it, including when the lines of family aren't marked by blood. It is a story about the sacrifices of a parent, the sometimes silent questions of children, and what we need to know in order to survive. It is a story of resiliency. The novel drips with

figurative language, poetic meditations, and the eager, hungry dialogue of people who love each other—even when they struggle to find the words. (Grades 9-12)

The Little Doctor/El Doctorcito written by Juan J. Guerra and illustrated by Victoria Castillo. Piñata Books, 2017. ISBN: 978-1558858466

This English-Spanish bilingual picture book is the story of Salvador, a young boy who dreams of becoming medical doctor after helping his Spanish-speaking abuela navigate a crowded clinic and an uncaring doctor. The books' vibrant cartoonlike illustrations enrich the text, and the fact that the story is based on the childhood experiences of the author, who is now a medical doctor, make the book delightful to read. The author and illustrator are indeed role models for growing artists. This book also makes us aware of the diversity among Latinas/os while highlighting their shared cultural values of familism, empathy, education, and hard work. In the candid manner of a child's perspective, the book introduces hefty issues about healthcare policy, cultural expectations, and stereotypes. Analysis of these themes could lead to rich classroom discussions and opportunities for fostering cross-cultural understanding. (Grades K-5).

Little Skeletons Countdown to Midnight/Esqueletitos: Un Libro Para Contar En EL Día De Los Muertos written and illustrated by Susie Jaramillo. Canticos, 2017. 978945635069

This unique nursery rhyme and number board book charmingly captures the celebratory spirit of Dia de los Muertos. The endearing illustrations coupled with amusing rhymes invite children to engage in the lively chorus found at the end of each verse. While intended for toddlers and young children, the story can be read to children of all ages to honor the holiday, which is commemorated by many Latino cultures. An added feature of the book is its accordion design, which when flipped presents the story in Spanish. A clock with movable hand pieces allows young readers to manipulate it as well. (Grades PK – 1)